Royal Authority in the Kingdom of Ryukyu
Ca. 1100 – 1300: “Gusuku Age”
城時代

Ca. 1300 – 1429: “Three Principalities” 三山時代

Ca. 1100 – 1400: “Age of the Aji”
按司時代

1407 – 1470: First Shō Dynasty 第一尚氏王朝

1470 – 1879: Second Shō Dynasty 第二尚氏王朝

Ca. 1400 – 1609: “Old-Ryūkyū” 古琉球

1609 – 1879: “Early-modern Ryūkyū” 近世琉球

1871-9: “Ryūkyū shobun” process 琉球処分
The Ryukyu Empire, 1440s -1609

Created and maintained by military force

- Okinawa came under the control of a single king.
- The kings of Okinawa then expanded their territory north and south.
- In the north, they competed with southward-expanding Japanese rulers of the province of Satsuma.
- All of these activities required military force (an obvious point, but . . . )
- Okinawan kings’ ties to China were a key element in this expansion.
- Major turning point: Satsuma’s successful invasion of 1609.
Relations with Ming China in the “Old-Ryukyu” Period

- Investiture (*sappō* or *sakuhō*) was just as important as trade.

- By 1398 all three “kings” of Okinawa received investiture from the Ming court.

- Between 1471 (Shō En) and 1603 (Shō Nei) Ryukyuan kings received a standard set of ceremonial items from the Ming court, which corresponded with the Chinese rank of *junwang*.

- *Junwang* was the second royal rank, and it corresponded to a grandson of the emperor.

- Symbols of fictive kinship (grandfather – grandson) helped define the relationship between the Chinese emperor and Ryukyuan king.
If we look at the items the Chinese court bestowed on Ryukyuan kings between 1372 and 1627 as recorded in the *Ming shilu* 明實錄, they fall into the following 10 categories: 1) the calendar; 2) the gold-plated seal; 3) embroidered items; brocade; 4) *hiben* crown; other crowns; 5) *hiben* robes; other robes; 6) belts; 7) footwear; 8) currency; 9) pottery and iron axes; 10) ships.
Economic basis of royal authority until ca. 1600: international trade

Main reason for decline: European (esp. Portuguese) competition
Domestic Basis of Royal Authority: Military Power and Solar Ideology

Teda (Tiida)

Seji (power)

High Priestesses (kikoe-ōgimi)

Via ritual transfer

(会圖才三) 式機狼佛
Importance of King Shō Shin 尚真 (1477-1526)

- Centralized military command, re-organized structure of military forces, improved fortifications at Shuri Castle, and brought all the local warlords (aji) to the royal capital of Shuri

- Formalized status ranks and hierarchies for male and female officials

- Minted coins, established monuments, built Buddhist temples, built the Tamaudun royal mortuary complex (to enhance symbolic authority)
Major Change: Satsuma Invasion of 1609

Shuri Castle

Mie Castle

Harbor Entrance

Yarazamori Castle
(Southern shore defense assembly area)

Tomi Castle
(Command and control base)

To Castle
(Main arsenal
Harbor)

Pearl Road
(1522)
Unten Harbor (Place where Satsuma forces landed successfully after initial retreat from Naha Harbor)

Satsuma Ships in Naha (after 1609)
Satsuma’s invasion, plus the conquest of China by the Manchu Qing dynasty during the 17th century, resulted in stronger diplomatic and cultural ties between Ryukyu and China.

One result was that Ryukyuan specialists began to master several bodies of Chinese knowledge, including medicine, geomancy (fengshui), and Confucianism.

Sai On’s vision: If made into an ideal Confucian society, Ryukyu would be on a moral par with its larger neighbors.
Early-modern kings were portrayed as Confucian sages.

Personal authority of the king-as-sage increased (at least in theory).

Connection to the power of the sun, especially via the mediation of women, no longer played a role in the ideology of royal authority.
Shō Tei (1669-1709)  Shō Iku (1829-1848)
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